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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

Wednesday, October 8, 1941.

Subject: "PATHWAYS FOR FIRES." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Chemistry and Engineering, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Every year, in October, Fire Prevention Week focusses attention on the fire hazards that could be cured right in our own homes. If you live in the country, a fire in your house may result in a greater loss than a fire in a city home. Volunteer firemen can't get there as fast as town firemen who wait ready for calls. Poor roads may hamper the rural fire crew, too. A small blaze may get so far under way before help comes that your home may burn to the ground.

Of course everybody should take precautions against fire, but it's particularly important for every farm family to inspect all its farm buildings regularly for fire hazards, and remove them immediately. You, as a homemaker, can't correct all structural faults with your own hands, naturally, but you can notice what's needed, and get a handy man to do what you cannot.

Right now is the time to check the condition of the chimney- one of the most serious home fire hazards. More fires are traced to defective flues and stovepipe connections than to any other single cause. Before you start the furnace this fall, have the chimney inspected for cracks and loose bricks. If there is any wooden construction near the chimney, see that it stops at least 2 inches short of the brick work. The chimney should not hold up any part of the house. Nor should a wooden frame hold up part of the chimney. If the chimney settles or the wood shrinks, dangerous cracks may open up.

Another thing: Are the stove pipes at least 18 inches away from wooden construction? They should never run through floors or closets. If you have to put a stovepipe through a partition, protect it with an insulated or ventilated metal

collar that will keep the pipe away from woodwork. Spark arrestors on top of the chimney will prevent chance sparks from scattering on the roof, also fire resistant roofing is an added protection. Install a lightning rod, if you haven't one. Get a licensed electrician to check your electric wiring.

Most home fires are preventable. Many of them start in the basement. But when they start they can be held in check to some extent by using firestops of several kinds to keep a fire in the cellar, and to slow up fires that get started anywhere else. Fire prevention specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture point out that unstopped spaces between the studs of the walls are flues. If a fire is raging in the cellar the flames can be drawn up through several of these "natural flues" at the same time to the upper floors and roof. Good builders stop each studding space at cellar ceiling level with a tight-fitting wooden block. Or they may use strips of sheet metal, bricks, or metal lath and plaster. Then they may also cover the fire stops with 3 or 4 inches of some material like broken mortar or sand and gravel, that won't burn. In some houses already built, you can't get at the inside of the studding to do this, but you can use fire-stops at the level of the cellar ceiling.

Cellars often are not ceiled and the under side of the flooring of the first story is exposed. You could have the cellar ceiling plastered on metal lath. Finish it tight against all the walls, sills, and girders. Use the same fire-resistant finish on both sides of the walls and ceiling of the cellar stairway.

That cellar stairway is one of the first upward paths taken by a basement fire. If you have the door at the top of the cellar stairs covered with metal over asbestos, it may hold back a cellar fire until you can bring it under control.

Of course you need some way of getting out of the house if you should be caught upstairs when a fire starts. If your house is not large enough to allow a

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second stairway, a door to a flat-topped porch roof is a very practical plan as you can then reach the ground with a short rope.

Members of the family and hired help may need training to make them careful about matches, smoking, and other common causes of fire. Teach them to take unusual precautions in storing and using the inflammable and oily materials needed around every farm-- gasoline and kerosene. Be prepared to put out small fires by having a chemical extinguisher-- in good order-- in a handy place. Also keep 2 or 3 pails of water always filled, somewhere close to the house. And a bucket of sand in the kitchen or on the back porch to smother blazes from grease or oil.

The fire prevention experts say that every farm needs a telephone to call for help promptly in case of fire. If you have no natural supply of water near the house, such as a pond or creek, you need a large artificial supply in a reservoir within about half a mile. And a well-equipped community fire truck within 10 miles. Women can sometimes get together and insist on having some of these protective measures.

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